



## Native Trees Benefit Pollinators

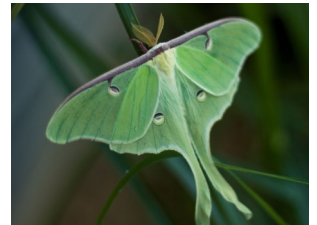


*Monarch butterfly*

When anyone talks about insect pollinators and pollinator gardens, thoughts usually drift to the monarch butterfly and milkweed, the monarch butterfly's life-cycle host plant. But there are many other insect pollinators of great importance to our environmental and agricultural systems. Each pollinator insect has specific plant hosts needed and preferred for growth and reproduction, and many of those plant hosts are native trees.

### Food source for caterpillars

In the spring, caterpillars emerge from eggs laid on trees when leaves unfurl and flowers blossom. Pollinator species are very specific for their host plants. For example, the luna moth starts its life as a caterpillar from eggs laid on the leaves of hickories, walnut, persimmon and other trees. They grow through five stages called instars while relying on the tree for food. At each stage, the caterpillar sheds its outer exoskeleton coat. Once it reaches the last instar stage, it morphs into a resting and transformation stage known as the pupae or chrysalis. The beautiful green moth emerges from this stage as an adult and ensures that eggs are deposited on the host trees for the next life cycle.



*Luna moth*

### Food source for birds



*Carolina chickadee*

Caterpillars are a food source for our local birds. A single pair of breeding chickadees must find 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars to rear one clutch of young, according to a notable study by researcher Doug Tallamy.



*Luna moth caterpillar*

### Keystone plants for birds in the North Carolina Piedmont

There are many trees native to the Piedmont region that are important hosts for insect larvae that birds eat. According to the Keystone Native Plants list created by Tallamy, oaks, black cherry, native plums, Carolina cherry-laurel, hickories, river birch, black willow, and maples are some of the important insect host plants in the NC Piedmont. White Oaks alone support over 400 species of insects that birds eat and feed their young. The complete list is available online from the New Hope Audubon Society.